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ED CONLEY/TEXAS

TEXAS -- A POLITICAL PROFILE

ANNCR:

WITH THE STATE OF TEXAS ABOUT TO HOLD ITS FIRST EVER PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY, VOA'S EDWARD CONLEY HAS THIS REPORT ON ITS PEOPLE AND POLITICS.

VOICE:

TEXAS DOMINATES THE SOUTHWESTERN SECTION OF THE UNITED STATES IN SIZE AND POPULATION. IT IS THE SECOND LARGEST OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE THIRD MOST POPULATED (1975 CENSUS BUREAU ESTIMATES). ITS NORTHERN BORDER AREA IS BUFFETED BY BLIZZARDS IN WINTER TIME WHILE SOUTHERN TEXAS LIES IN SEMI-TROPICAL TEMPERATURES. EASTERN TEXAS ENJOYS FERTILE, RAIN-FED FARMLAND. WESTERN TEXAS LIVES WITH FLAT, WATERLESS DESERTS.

THE POLITICS OF TEXAS IS NOT AS DIVERSE AS ITS LANDSCAPE. ITS VOTERS, TO A GREAT EXTENT, ARE CONSERVATIVE, RALLYING TO CALLS FOR NATIONAL STRENGTH, SHYING AWAY FROM WHAT THEY CONSIDER FEDERAL INFRINGEMENT OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS. THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED ELEVEN MILLION PEOPLE LIVING IN TEXAS -- HALF OF THEM REGISTERED VOTERS. THERE IS NO PARTY REGISTRATION IN THE LONE STAR STATE. BUT TEXAS HAS BEEN TRADITIONALLY REGARDED AS IN THE DEMOCRATIC CAMP EVEN THOUGH IN THE LAST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, IT GAVE REPUBLICAN RICHARD NIXON AN IMPRESSIVE SIXTY-SEVEN PERCENT OF ITS VOTE IN HIS VICTORY OVER GEORGE MCGOVERN.

TEXANS CASTING THEIR BALLOTS IN AN ELECTION RANGE FROM POOR RURAL FARMERS TO THE STATE'S FAMED MILLIONAIRES WHOSE FORTUNES HAVE BEEN MADE IN THE OIL, ELECTRONICS, INSURANCE

AND AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIES. IT IS THOSE WEALTHY TEXANS WHO THROUGH THE YEARS HAVE DOMINATED STATE POLITICS USING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AS THEIR APPARATUS. OF LATE, THERE HAS BEEN A SLIGHT SHIFT, WITH TEXAS POWER BROKERS MOVING MORE TO THE REPUBLICAN PARTY RANKS, AND TO HOUSTON, THE OPERATING BASE OF OIL-RICH TEXANS AND THE STATE'S LARGEST CITY, WHICH IS BECOMING A CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN STRONGHOLD. NINE MILLION TEXANS LIVE IN URBAN AREAS IN CITIES SUCH AS HOUSTON, DALLAS, FORT WORTH, SAN ANTONIO AND THE STATE CAPITAL, AUSTIN. TWO MILLION TEXANS LIVE IN RURAL AREAS.

IN SATURDAY'S PRIMARY, OBSERVERS ARE LOOKING FOR NO SUPRISES FROM RURAL AREAS WHERE, AS THEY SAY, DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IS A WAY OF LIFE. NOR DO THEY EXPECT CHANGES FROM CITIES LIKE SAN ANTONIO, HALF OF WHOSE CITIZENS ARE MEXICAN-AMERICANS AND WHO ARE SOLID DEMOCRATIC VOTERS, OR FROM AUSTIN, TEXAS' LIBERAL CENTER. THEIR SIGHTS INSTEAD WILL BE SET ON HOUSTON AND OTHER OIL-ASSOICATED LOCALES AND ON THE INDUSTRIALIZED DALLAS-FORT WORTH AREA WHERE IT'S PROBABLE THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL RACE BETWEEN GERALD FORD AND RONALD REAGAN WILL BE SETTLED. THE QUESTIONS WHICH COULD BE ANSWERED ARE: HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS THE POLITICAL ELITE IN TEXAS BEEN IN ATTEMPTING TO SWITCH VOTER ALLEGIANCE TO THE REPUBLICAN PARTY, AND HOW CONSERVATIVE DOES A CONSERVATIVE HAVE TO BE TO WIN AN ELECTION IN TEXAS?

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